



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS

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### INTERIOR RECOMMENDS ADDITIONS TO THE NATION'S COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES SYSTEM

Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks William P. Horn today released proposed recommendations for expansion of the Nation's Coastal Barrier Resources System (System). Horn invited public review and comment during a 90-day period prior to preparation of the Secretary of the Interior's final recommendations for submission to Congress.

Today's action responds to Congressional direction contained in the 1982 Coastal Barrier Resources Act. The Act established a 186-unit Coastal Barrier Resources System along 667 miles of Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico shoreline. It also required the Interior Department to study and recommend additions to, deletions from, or modifications to the system and to consider other alternatives to foster conservation of coastal resources.

The 1982 Act prohibits most new Federal expenditures and financial assistance for development within units included in the System. New Federal flood insurance, road and channel construction, and utility subsidies are examples of activities prohibited within the System. State, local, and private financial assistance and expenditures are not affected by the Act.

The draft recommendations announced today encourage legislative action to add the following areas to the Coastal Barrier Resources System:

- o All aquatic habitats associated with the coastal barriers originally designated in the System. While the Act defines undeveloped coastal barriers as including adjacent wetlands and estuaries, the originally-designated units focused more on the land portions where flood insurance would be precluded.

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- o Undeveloped coastal barriers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- o Coastal barriers in large embayments such as the Chesapeake Bay, Narragansett Bay, etc.
- o Unprotected areas that function as coastal barriers but are not composed entirely of unconsolidated sediments. Examples include bedrock/glacial deposits in New England and carbonate-cemented and mangrove shorelines in the Florida Keys and the Caribbean.

Eighteen states along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts are fronted by nearly 400 coastal barriers. These coastal areas of shifting sand, shell, and gravel range from small, isolated shoals to extensive chains of islands stretching for hundreds of miles.

In announcing the recommendations, Horn said, "We number the coastal barriers, mangrove swamps, and other wetlands included in these recommendations among the most important of this Nation's natural resource assets. They provide important spawning, nursery, and nesting habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species of both commercial and recreational value. They also provide a buffer between mainland areas and the open sea.

"The instability of coastal barriers and their susceptibility to storm damage make development hazardous and too costly to subsidize and insure at the taxpayer's expense," Horn said. "For these reasons, the Interior Department is recommending some additions to the System, including associated aquatic habitats."

Coastal wetlands are the spawning and nursery areas for an estimated 90 percent of the fin and shellfish harvested each year in the U.S. The System's beaches offer nesting habitat for endangered sea turtles and numerous species of shorebirds. They also offer an exceptional variety of recreational opportunities.

Since the mid-1950's, however, about 400,000 acres of coastal wetlands have been lost, with the current annual loss estimated at 18,000 acres. Although comprising only 16 percent of the Nation's land area, the coastal zone contains approximately 62 percent of the Nation's population, according to the Census Bureau.

The draft recommendations announced today resulted from studies by a Coastal Barriers Study Group created by the Secretary of the Interior in 1983 and staffed by professionals from the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey. This group worked closely with representatives from the various coastal States to assure their views were given full consideration.

Copies of the proposed recommendations announced today are now available upon written request from the Coastal Barriers Study Group, National Park Service, (498), P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127. Public comments are invited and should be addressed to the Coastal Barriers Study Group at the above address.